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SUBJECT: MUGABE BIOGRAPHER SAYS MBEKI MEDIATION WILL FAIL;
URGES U.K. OUTREACH

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¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Mugabe biographer Heidi Holland doubts that the Zimbabwean leader is serious about the South African-led talks. Mugabe will continue to "run rings" around South African President Mbeki, as he has done for years. She fears a vengeful Mugabe is intent on destroying the Zimbabwean opposition. In her view, only direct U.K. talks with Mugabe could possibly lead to his departure from office, a point she recently made to U.K. Foreign Secretary Miliband. Holland recommends using former Zimbabwean Minister Denis Norman, one of the few people Mugabe trusts, as the link between Harare and London. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) PolOff met on July 15 in Johannesburg with Heidi Holland, author of the recently-published biography of Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe entitled "Dinner with Mugabe." Working through Mugabe confidante Father Fidelis Mukonori, Holland secured a 2 1/2 hour interview with Mugabe in January 2008 (Mugabe's last interview with Western media was three years earlier). Holland also interviewed dozens of people who know Mugabe well, and worked closely with psychologists to flesh out the portrait of Mugabe.

Mbeki Will Fail

¶3. (C) Holland painted a picture of a paranoid, sad, lonely and vengeful Mugabe, intent on holding onto power at all costs. Holland doubts that Mugabe is serious about the South African-led negotiations with the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), noting that Mugabe has no respect for the MDC and regards Mbeki as little more than a "boy." As he has done since 2000, Mugabe will run circles around Mbeki, buying time to destroy the political opposition.

Only U.K. Can Succeed

¶4. (C) According to Holland, Mugabe continues to believe (however falsely) that his real problem is the United Kingdom. This reflects Mugabe's deep-seated belief that the British failed to hold up their end of the Lancaster House bargain. Despite his harsh anti-U.K. rhetoric, Mugabe idealizes the British and craves their respect. In Holland's

view, the only possibility of getting Mugabe out of power before he dies -- which could be a long time, Holland said, noting that his mother lived to be nearly 100 -- is direct British engagement with Mugabe. Holland met with U.K. Foreign Secretary Miliband during his July 6-8 trip to South Africa to make her pitch for direct talks with Mugabe. She says Miliband listened to her arguments, although was skeptical.

15. (C) The ideal person to serve as the link between the U.K. and Mugabe, Holland suggested, is Denis Norman, the white Zimbabwean who served as a minister in Mugabe's government and now lives the U.K. Holland said that Mugabe has confidence in Norman, one of only a few people he trusts (she also mentioned Father Mukonori and former EU advisor Tim Sheehy). Holland did not see a major role for the USG in her proposed outreach to Mugabe, but noted that Mugabe respected former Secretary of State Kissinger.

16. (C) Holland suggested that Mugabe might be willing to accept a "best person government," with Mugabe as Head of State but "technocrats" running the ministries. This is much QState but "technocrats" running the ministries. This is much more palatable than a "government of national unity" or "transitional government," and could be sold to Mugabe as resembling his first term as president (1980-85), a period Mugabe remembers fondly.

Sad, Lonely, Vengeful

17. (SBU) The Zimbabwean president is isolated and lonely, Holland suggested, and has been much of his life. Mugabe was abandoned by his father at a young age; as a child, "books

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